

# Mary Shelley's Prose or, the Romantic Imagination Reconsidered

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI  
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ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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**Mary Shelley's Prose or, the Romantic Imagination Reconsidered**

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**Mary Shelley's Prose or, the Romantic Imagination Reconsidered**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to give an in-depth analysis of Mary Shelley's prose, specifically her novels *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, *Valperga: or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* and *The Last Man*, in the context of Romantic imagination. Mary Shelley's personal life is just as fascinating as her literary work. Her upbringing in a household of authors, and her later marriage to one of the greatest poets of Romanticism explains her passion for literature and her talent for writing. To give an overview of the importance of Mary Shelley this paper examines Mary Shelley's early life and her becoming an author under the influence of her family as well as the principles of Romantic literature which were a foundation for her own literary work. However, the main purpose of this paper is to give an insight into the three novels by Mary Shelley and explain her views on the Romantic literary ideals along with her critique of the imbalance between masculine and feminine ideology in society.

Keywords: Mary Shelley, Romantic imagination, Romantic poetry, Gothic novel, literary theory

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## Introduction

Mary Shelley is today most well-known for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. This novel was immediately loved by the public, and it has been read by different generations ever since it was first published. *Frankenstein* has been a repeating theme in popular culture and there are countless movies and TV series based on this famous character. The most popular cinematic version of Shelley's novel is probably James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) with the brilliant representation of the monster from the actor Boris Karloff. However, it is important to mention that the movies based on *Frankenstein* resulted from the directors reading of the novel and they step away from the original text. Even though *Frankenstein* is a statement in the horror genre, this novel conveys a deeper message. Through *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley wanted to express her worries and her critique of ideologies of the Post-Enlightenment period. She also wrote other significant novels which did not get the same attention as *Frankenstein* but still carry a very powerful message. Two of those novels, *Valperga: or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* and *The Last Man* will be analyzed in this paper alongside *Frankenstein*.

Romantic authors, contemporaries of Mary Shelley, are known for their extreme sensibility and "overflow of feelings" in their work. Romanticism, as a response to the Neoclassicism disregards the rules of order and rationality and focuses on the sentiment and the power of imagination. From this movement, the idea of Romantic imagination developed and occupied the minds of Romantic authors, specifically Romantic poets. The idea was that only poets possess the divine power of imagination which gives them the ability to create literary pieces which can change the world. Romantic imagination is an ideal created by the two generations of Romantic poets. Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge represent the first generation, while Shelley, Keats and Byron belong to the second generation. The Gothic novel and the ideas of the sublime make part of the Romantic prose. In the Gothic novel genre Mary Shelley will find her fame.

The story of *Frankenstein* became widely known, contrary to the life of its author. Mary Shelley's upbringing and personal life will be discussed in the first chapter of this paper. She was a daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft who were both authors themselves. Her father's political views just like her mother's proto-feminist ideas can be sensed in all works by Mary Shelley. Throughout her life she was influenced by prominent

Romantic authors, she had the pleasure of meeting many of them and eventually married Percy Bysshe Shelley, a famous Romantic poet. Her personal relationships hold importance because these relations formed her as an author and inspired her works to the extent that they could be considered autobiographical.

The second chapter is devoted to presenting the tenets of Romanticism in general and the principles of the Romantic imagination. It is divided into two sections, one dealing with Romantic poetry, and the other with Romantic prose. In this chapter the works and ideas of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron are analyzed because they are the foundation for Mary Shelley's criticism in her novels. Mary Shelley's fame originated from the Romantic prose, particularly the Gothic novel. In this section the aesthetic of the sublime by Edmund Burke and Ann Radcliffe's strand of the Gothic novel are presented. The remaining chapters focus on the three novels by Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, *Valperga: or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* and *The Last Man*. Each chapter deals with a different novel, providing a summary and the analysis of Mary Shelley's own worldviews and ideas. Through her novels the influence of her mother, father and husband can be sensed but these chapters revolve around Mary's critique of the society, political ideologies, scientific revolution, and above all the critique of the concepts of Romantic imagination specifically the notion of overcoming human limitations and associating the divine power of creation with human individuals.

## 1. Becoming an author

### 1.1. Early life with famous parents

Mary was born in 1797, to already famous parents who were members of the Enlightenment movement (Pearson, 2020). William Godwin, Mary's father, was a philosopher and author of political prose. His most famous works are *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and the novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), also known as the first fictive thriller (Pearson, 2020). Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, known as one of the first feminists inspired Mary Shelley to become an author herself. Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), her best known work in which she expressed her ideas as an advocate for women's education and development. Unfortunately, just a few days after Mary's birth, her mother passed away due to complications during labor. Mary Shelley and her half-sister Fanny Imlay, who was the first daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and her former lover Gilbert Imlay, were left in care of William Godwin. Godwin soon remarried and Mary Jane Clairmont became Mary's and Fanny's new stepmother. Mary Jane Clairmont already had children of her own and soon gave birth to a son, William. Mary had a difficult relationship with her stepmother, and they were not fond of each other, mostly because she had many characteristics of her mother, which were not considered proper in that time, and because she was very close with father (Pearson, 2020). Even though her father distanced himself from Mary when he remarried, and she never knew her mother, both of her parents influenced her life and work greatly. She admired her parents and wanted to one day live up to them. As a child she would often visit her mother grave and read her work which would later serve as her greatest inspiration. Mary put bits and pieces of herself and her life into her work and she always tried to live up to her parents. She followed their lead when writing *Frankenstein* as both of her parents had written novelistic fiction (Johnson, 2009). As a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mary Shelley never received a formal education even though her mother was an advocate for women's rights to an education. Despite not having this advantage, like the male authors of her time, her gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) was a big success. Today the legacy of Mary Shelley has had many adaptations in popular culture through movies, TV series, comic books and other literary works. However, even though *Frankenstein* may seem as just a classic horror story, like in all her works Mary Shelley imparted an implicit message. This paper will present an interpretation of Mary Shelley's prose and the ideas she wanted to share through her writing.



## 1.2. Paternal and authoritative influence of William Godwin

Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, also called "the Philosopher", was a part of the circle of British reformers who were supporting the French Revolution. Both him and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft strongly opposed to marriage because they viewed it as loss of liberty but decided to get married once they found out that Mary was pregnant. After his wife passed away, he published her biography *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), admiring Mary's independence but there was a strong, negative reaction from the conservative public (Johnson, 2009). Even after the publishing of these memoirs, William remained respectable while Mary was considered scandalous and improper. This is what made Mary Shelley believe that "difference between the sexes was not so much biological as narrative" (Johnson, 2009, p. 113). As already mentioned, Mary Shelley's parents greatly affected her work and this is the reason why in *Frankenstein* the representation of a woman that we get is split "between a non-narrative image of female beauty and authoritative and violent male narrator" (Johnson, 2009, p. 113). Mary Shelley was often criticized that her female characters are idealized which contrasted her mother feminist views (Johnson, 2009). One of the examples, is Mary Shelley's description of Elizabeth, Victor's future wife in *Frankenstein*, as a very thin and fair woman with hair like gold which are physical features of an "ideal woman". This made-man myth also assumes that a woman should devote her life to others, specifically men, and be a caregiver ready to sacrifice herself for the benefit of others. Mary Shelley portrayed her female characters this way for a reason. In *Frankenstein* the story revolves around male characters only and Shelley wanted to express the marginalization of women in the male-dominated society.

Mary spent a lot of time reading her parents' works and learning from them. She acquired the knowledge of narrative techniques from the novel *Caleb Williams* her father wrote. Not only do both *Caleb Williams* and her *Frankenstein* revolve around mystery and pursuit but also the narrators in the novels *The Last Man* (1826) written by Mary and *Caleb Williams* have certain similarities (Johnson, 2009, p. 112). In both novels male characters look for a mentor who will help them transform their lives. However, the mentors in these novels are complete opposites. In *The Last Man* Adrian remains good-natured and eventually dies, while Falkland in *Caleb Williams* is revengeful and abuses his power (Johnson, 2009, p. 112).

William Godwin had strong political opinions, expressing his radical political views through writing, he would be considered an anarchist. Like Mary Wollstonecraft he was

strongly opposed anything that was placing boundaries and limiting people's freedom including the government. He argued that government was a corrupt system and that it only makes people be dependent and takes away their ability to grow (Bharti, 2020, p. 105). His political involvement represented a big part of his life, and he had strong political opinions and ideas on different aspects of society, so it is not a surprise that they affected his daughter and her work as well. As observed in *Frankenstein*, the monster feels that he is being excluded from different social circles. One of William's political theories explains that society divides into small non-inclusive circles when the government places boundaries on it. Frankenstein's monster is however intelligent and notices the flaws of these separated circles in the society (Bharti, 2020, p. 105). This presents one of the many examples of William Godwin's influence on his daughter's work and it shows just how much Mary was affected by her father's views. William even helped Mary write one of her novels, *Valperga*, which was published in 1823.

Mary valued her father's opinion so when she wrote a story *Mathilda* in 1819, she first sent it to her father, but he found it "disgusting and detestable" (Johnson, 2009, p. 119). The reason for this was the fact that *Mathilda* tackles incestuous love a father felt for his daughter and the daughter had suicidal thoughts. Because William never returned *Mathilda* it was eventually published years later, in 1959. However, the theme of incest was common in the writings of Romantic authors. According to Johnson (2009) the male narrators had a psychology of narcissistic doubles. In those incestuous relationships between siblings the characters were actually in love with the reflection of themselves in their brother/sister. But, in Mary's *Mathilda* the incest is between a father and a daughter. This brings paternal principle into question and this principle is the base of authority in the West (Johnson, 2009, p. 119). Discussing or writing about such things as incestuous love between a father and a daughter was considered taboo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Mary's father was aware of the consequences of such actions. Another possible problem with *Mathilda* could be that the daughter is thinking about suicide. When William Godwin wrote *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* he also described his wife's two suicide attempts and called her "a female Werther". This put a social stigma on Mary Wollstonecraft's name as suicide was not acceptable. Interestingly, Mary Shelley had put *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as one of the books the monster in *Frankenstein* was reading in order to acquire knowledge about the human world (Johnson, 2009, p. 121).

### 1.3. Proto-feminist views of Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Shelley's mother was anything but ordinary. She had a child out of wedlock, she opposed marriage, she attempted suicide twice, she was a proto-feminist and an advocate for equality and women's rights to formal education. This made her scandalous in the eyes of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society. The situation got even worse when Godwin published *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* sharing her private life and all controversial aspects of it with the public. Even though William was impressed with his late wife's intelligence and independence, the rest of the society did not agree with him (Lopez, 2018). Many women from the upper class supported Mary when *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was first published, because they agreed with her arguments for women's education. However, when Godwin published works describing her personal life, women from the upper class found it no longer acceptable to associate themselves and give public support to someone who was considered inappropriate like Wollstonecraft. This created an even more difficult situation for her daughter Mary who loved her fiercely and saw her as an inspiration but also knew the social stigma women, who live freely like her mother, must carry (Mellor, 1988). It will be years before Mary Wollstonecraft will be truly appreciated for her feminist efforts and advanced way of thinking. Even though Mary Shelley never met her mother, she would exert a great influence on her life and her work. Mary wanted to learn about her mother, and she obviously admired her because she put so much of her mother's beliefs into her own work:

“Despite not having known her mother, Shelley was imprinted with Wollstonecraft's influence and beliefs, especially when it came to feminism and education, through perusal of Wollstonecraft's literary works. Various scholars have taken notice of the Wollstonecraftian influence in Shelley's work and have credited it to the daughter's desire to learn about her mother and her beliefs by reading her writings.” (Lopez, 2018, p.1)

Mary Wollstonecraft is certainly most well-known for her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, however, two years prior she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* as a response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and that is when she truly started to think about equality between men and women and women's education (Johnson, 2009). Mary lived what she preached. She was completely independent in a sense that neither her father nor her husband supported her financially. Even though the French Revolution started a new idea of equality this is not what motivated Mary to pursue her proto-feminist ideas. She was fighting for women's right to vote but rather for their right to formal education which she

explained in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). Her ideas were not just about the equality that the French Revolution had brought, but she argued that without proper education people are wasting their lives which is a shame because people are blessed with only one life, so we need to be careful how we live it and try to reach our full potential. Women are deprived of living a fulfilled life because they are not allowed an education (Johnson, 2009). Unfortunately, even though Mary was such an advocate for women's development neither one of her daughters received a formal education. When Godwin was asked about this situation he replied:

“Your enquiries relate principally to the two daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft. They are neither of them brought up with an exclusive attention to the system and ideas of their mother. I lost her in 1797, and in 1801 I married a second time. One among the motives which led me to choose this was the feeling I had in myself of an incompetence for the education of daughters. The present Mrs. Godwin has great strength and activity of mind, but is not exclusively a follower of the notions of their mother; and indeed, having formed a family establishment without having a previous provision for the support of a family, neither Mrs. Godwin nor I have leisure enough for reducing novel theories of education to practice, while we both of us honestly endeavour, as far as our opportunities will permit, to improve the minds and characters of the younger branches of our family” (Godwin, 1812 as cited in Mellor, 1988)

According to Mary Wollstonecraft there are three elements of human nature: the reason, the emotions, and the senses. The so-called education women were getting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not develop women's reason but restricted it. Mary believed that women should only be guided by reason and therefore she advocates for proper education which will strengthen the mind. Mary also found marriage to be unjust towards women because they are being viewed as property, passed from fathers to husbands (Johnson, 2009). In the last novel she wrote, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, that she never got a chance to finish because of her premature death, she is showing how women of different class all face the same problem: they are controlled by men their whole lives and men determine their destiny. No matter rich or poor, a woman can be ruined if she has any kind of sexual relations before marriage even if those relations were forced upon her. The “wrongs of woman” in the title symbolize the injustice women face in marriage (Johnson, 2009).

Even though Mary Wollstonecraft passionately advocated for reason, especially that women need to make decisions guided by rationality and put their emotions aside, she did not

quite live by her words. Her works are based on the importance of reason and quality education that would encourage it. Mary, however, was a very emotional woman in her private life. She had two very passionate and complicated affairs before she finally settled down and married William Godwin. When she found out that her lover Gilbert Imlay, with whom she had a daughter, was not faithful to her, she tried to commit suicide twice. She even went to Scandinavia after everything to be his business agent and try to renew their relationship (Johnson, 2009). During her stay in Scandinavia, she published *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). Wollstonecraft combined letters she had sent to Imlay into a unique book. These letters were also the last piece of work she published during her lifetime. It was a start of a new genre, a travel diary, that became very popular with Romantic authors. Even her daughter Mary, who was so keen on reading her mother's works would try to render a travel diary as well. Along with her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley she wrote *History of a Six-Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland: With Letters Descriptive of a Sail round the Lake of Geneva, and of the Glaciers of Chamouni* (1817). This is the first published work of Mary Shelley which will set her on her path as an author, thanks to the influence of her mother beyond the grave (Johnson, 2009).

#### **1.4. Turbulent marriage as a literary inspiration**

Percy Bysshe Shelley, born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August in 1792, is one of the most well-known and important literary figures of English Romanticism. Even though he created very important literary work, his wife Mary surpassed him in popularity with her novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. Percy had a very enticing personality, and he awoke admiration. He was handsome and very intelligent which resulted in him always being surrounded by women. He met Mary because he greatly admired her father William Godwin, before he even knew about her existence the two men were exchanging letters discussing radical political views. William was impressed by Shelley because he could see that was an intelligent young man but also because he enjoyed Percy's flattery and the fact that he was from a wealthy family. Soon, Godwin started to invite Shelley to have dinner with his family every day. During one of Percy's visits, he met Mary who was only fifteen years old at the time (Mellor, 1988). Mary would often go to her mother's grave to read her works and Percy started to join her every day for a walk. It was not long before they confessed their affection for one another. Percy reminded Mary of her father, in a sense that she found him and his mind extraordinary. Percy was also

very young and handsome, and he reciprocated her love which she was so desperate for during her lonely childhood. Percy already greatly admired Mary's parents, so he expected Mary to live up to their intelligent and revolutionary ideas. He thought of her as his soulmate. However, Percy was married at the time, so it was not a surprise that Mary's father was extremely upset by this news and forbade them to meet again. The couple found this to be too difficult and they soon eloped and started their new life together (Mellor, 1988).

Mary often found inspiration for her work in Percy. Not only did he inspire Mary, but he also encouraged her to write:

“Percy always encouraged Mary to write. Indeed, he expected it of her as the daughter of two such literary geniuses. But neither Percy nor Mary ever considered her literary talent or efforts as equal to his, a fact that would have significant repercussions on the revisions of *Frankenstein*.” (Mellor, 1988, p. 23)

Percy was described as very emotional, which surely benefited his work as a poet. Percy considered love to be “the driving force of life” (Johnson, 2009, p. 144). He was even prepared to die for love. He slept with pistols and poison for a while. Influence of Percy can be seen in many works of Mary Shelley. According to Johnson (2009) when Mary wrote *Mathilda* the character of the father, who eventually kills himself, was greatly inspired by Percy. Mary's novel *The Last Man* resulted from her grief after Percy's sudden death. *The Last Man* takes place in a post-apocalyptic world with only one survivor. That is how Mary perceived herself without her husband, completely alone in the world. Just like *Frankenstein*, *The Last Man* has an introduction written by Mary in which she explains the circumstances which inspired her to write the novel. She explains how much of herself she put into the novel and how the grief for her husband affected the creation of *The Last Man* (Johnson, 2009). Mary's work is to some extent autobiographical, so it is no surprise that her characters possess certain attributes of her family members. *Frankenstein* is considered to consist of many autobiographical elements, some of them inspired by Percy. He was doing chemistry experiments which were not always safe, and he did not care much about the life around him. Mary criticized this obsession and need for knowledge which disregards everything else in its way (Johnson, 2009). Mary had another problem with Percy, he was not faithful to her. This bothered her and she struggled with it a lot. In *Valperga* there is an analysis of psychology of infidelity that expresses Mary's hardships in her relationship with Percy. Mary's life with Percy was not very happy especially since they had children. After their daughter Clara and their son William unfortunately passed

away, Mary blamed Percy. He also expressed how she was mourning for their children for too long which infuriated her even more (Johnson, 2009).

Even though Mary's work was influenced by Percy in many aspects, Mary also had a great effect on the public perception of Percy Bysshe Shelley as a poet. When Percy died Mary decided to be the editor of his works:

“When Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) died suddenly just short of his thirtieth birthday, his poetic remains comprised some hardly noticed to printed work and a chaos of manuscript. Through her editing work Mary Shelley (1797-1851) turned that awkward mass into something that laid the foundation for Shelley's status as a corner stone of English Romantic poetry.” (Richard, 2001, p.77)

For the first time in her life, Mary was the one who had the power over Percy, something that was never possible while he was alive. She was the one who would determine how the work of Percy would be presented to the public and how he would be remembered. Mary admired her late husband; she considered him highly intelligent and his work absolutely brilliant. That was exactly how she decided to present him to the rest of the world. She created an image of Percy as someone who brought nothing but joy and light into her life and as someone she was blessed to be around (Johnson, 2009). Mary really did love talking to Percy and discussing ideas, opinions, political views, and writing. This is what she had to say in the Introduction of *Frankenstein*:

“Travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time; and study, in the way of reading or improving my ideas in communication with his far more cultivated mind was all of literary employment that engaged my attention.” (Frankenstein, p. viii as cited in Johnson, 2009)

Mary created an image of Shelley as a poetic genius and while editing his poems she added a note to every one of them explaining how they came to be. This kind of editing gives a greater value to everything Percy had written while knowing Mary, and everything that was written before her becomes “Juvenilia” (Johnson, 2009).

After Percy's death, his body was burned at the beach it was found due to sanitary reasons. His heart was, however, brought to Mary and she kept it for the rest of her life. She

remained independent, trying to live from her writing. Percy's heart was buried alongside Mary when she died in 1851.

### **1.5. Meaningful experience with prominent Romantic authors**

Romanticism as an artistic and literary movement originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and lasted throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Romanticism embodies individuality, humanistic perspective, consciousness, and nature as a living spirit. In other words:

“It values inspiration over reason; emotional truth over abstraction; the imaginative over the rational; the spontaneous over the controlled; the sublime over the commonplace. It elevates our capacity to live in and with Nature over our capacity to subdue and control it; and our spiritual aspirations over our intellectual ambitions.” (Dwyer, 2008, p.3)

Mary Shelley also takes part in the literary creation during the Romantic period. In her prose she explored Romantic ideals, especially the principles of Romantic imagination. As Smith (1991) interestingly concludes, she is either “Romanticism's greatest critic or the greatest Romantic” (Smith, 1991, p.1). However, Mary had a personal experience with many Romantic authors. As the daughter of two intellectually refined and influential authors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, she had the pleasure of listening to the conversation her father had with many brilliant minds of that time such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Johnson, Humphrey Davy and William Hazlitt. She would listen to them discussing politics, literature, science, and philosophy. No doubt this had shaped her into a revolutionary, bright individual herself. She was even lucky enough to hear Samuel Taylor Coleridge personally recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Mellor, 1988).

These are not the only famous names Mary is associated with. Her husband was a good friend of the internationally known creator of Romanticism – Lord Byron. He was the one who sparked the idea of a ghost story in Mary Shelley's mind, and it eventually resulted in the creation of *Frankenstein*. Percy and Mary decided to visit Switzerland in 1816 and there they spent some time with Lord Byron. One night Byron came up with the idea that they would each write a ghost story. This sentence was the beginning of the creation of *Frankenstein*. Byron and Percy held on to more respectable genres, while Mary went on to write one of the first novels which contained elements of science-fiction. The friendship with Lord Byron and his



style of writing, especially the cult of the Byronic hero, definitely had its impact on Mary's own work.

Even though Mary had no formal education, her love for reading and access to her father's rich library shaped her into a perceptive individual. She had personally met many important authors that determined the frames of the Romantic literary period and was married to one. While reading Mary Shelley's prose we can familiarize ourselves with different ideals of Romantic imagination Mary critiqued. Considering she was personally acquainted with many Romantic authors, she might be the perfect commenter on the concepts and creative postulates procured by the stylistic formation of Romanticism.

## **2. Romantic imagination – the divine creative power**

### **2.1. Celebration of feeling over reason**

The idea of romantic imagination emerged from the brilliant minds of the most important names of the Romantic movement. The Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley each expressed their views on this divine power of creation bestowed to poets alone. To comprehend the concept of romantic imagination, it is necessary to probe the aesthetic of the Romantic movement. Romanticism can be seen as a response to Classicism and Neoclassicism which promoted ideas of order, harmony, and balance. It opposes the Enlightenment movement which was founded on the Scientific Revolution and rationalism. While the Enlightenment promoted reason, rationality, and empirical science, the Romanticism was more interested in the sensible part of human nature (Tarnas, 1993). Both movements were focused on the human perception of the universe, and both put human experience in the center of their attention. Human consciousness and all the different, even possibly hidden aspects of it, became new main theme in the culture of the Enlightenment and the Romanticism. Placing emphasis on human nature was something new and defied traditional values (Tarnas, 1993):

“Both were profoundly Promethean—in their rebellion against oppressive traditional structures, in their celebration of individual human genius, in their restless quest for human freedom, fulfillment, and bold exploration of the new.” (Tarnas, 1993, p.454)

In the period of Romanticism humans were valued for their imagination, individualism, emotional spectrum, self-expression, and creation. Nature was also the object of romantics' obsession. But not in sense that nature should be explained and observed for scientific purposes but rather considered as a live vessel, a source of mystery and spirit. Romantics thought that the human soul needs to connect with nature, enter it, be as one with it in order to reach spiritual revelation (Tarnas, 1993).

Considering that emotions and imagination had the highest value amongst the Romantic creators, when it comes to human awareness, they viewed it from the perspective of self-awareness. Complexities of human nature were not regarded in a form of scientific boundaries but rather the limitless spectrum of human emotions and spirit. However, the deep analysis of human spirit brought forward some new concerns. There is a dark part of the human soul which also needed to be explored. Many Romantic authors will focus precisely on those irrational parts of human soul which convey unimaginable mysteries. When it comes to human sentiment and human soul, one can only truly know their own. There is no objective way to discover someone's emotional side, one can only use introspection to discover deep, dark secrets of one owns soul (Tarnas, 1993).

Romantics also had a different view on reality, especially in comparison to the Enlightenment. Science views reality as a singular and tries to determine its boundaries, whereas for the Romantics there are multiple realities. Romantics claim that everything humans experience in their life leaves a unique mark on the human soul. Whilst science also thinks of truth as only one, Romanticism rather values multiple perspectives of truth. It also considers reality as a very complex notion which can have a variation of different meanings, even complete opposites. Romantics searched for order and meaning but they did not think that reason by itself is enough to get a complete understanding of the world. To get true knowledge imagination and emotions are crucial (Tarnas, 1993).

“Indeed, for many Romantics, imagination was in some sense the whole of existence, the true ground of being, the medium of all realities. It both pervaded consciousness and constituted the world.” (Tarnas, 1993, p. 458)

In Romanticism, the philosopher took on the role of the poet, perspective of the world was evaluated in terms of courage, beauty, and imaginative power rather than on the basis of abstract reason or empirical verification. As a result, the romantic sensibility promoted new criteria and principles for knowledge (Tarnas, 1993).

Romanticism fostered an interesting point of view on religion as well. The Enlightenment movement relied strictly on science and empirical evidence. Religion finds purpose in spirituality rather than objective evidence, so it was for the most part rejected by the purveyors of the Enlightenment. However, Romanticism did not accept forced beliefs or moral restrictions, religious institutions as such but Romantics found godly elements in human spirit and in the nature. They did not devote all their attention to one deity, one all-powerful God, they were more interested in the creative force nature possesses. Art also took a form of religion for the Romantics. Music, literature, painting, every form of art replaced the traditional idea of the divine. Spiritual world was extremely important in the Romanticism and art was providing the connection between the natural and the spiritual (Tarnas, 1993). William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge mark the beginning of Romanticism in the English literature with their collection of poems *Lyrical Ballads* published in 1798. Alongside William Blake, George Gordon Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats, they will be the most influential and important creators of the Romantic era. Their poetry brought new and revolutionary ideas of the Romanticism, never before seen in the English literature such as Wordsworth's principles of writing poetry, Coleridge's literary criticism and Shelley's ideas on poetic divinity. Eventually the form of Gothic novel will also emerge from the Romantic movement, and it will be popularized by the creator of *Frankenstein* herself, Mary Shelley.

## **2.2. Poetic pursuit of Romantic imagination**

Romantic ideas like imagination, emotion, spirituality, are most evident in the English Romantic poetry. Romantic poets are usually grouped into two categories. The first generation of poets are represented by William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron belong to the second generation of Romantic poets in English literature (Adabpal & Rohyal, 2019). For the Romantics imagination is a creative force that can bring nothingness into life. Poets are blessed with the ability to create brilliant work which is capable of changing the world by the means of the romantic imagination. It is an expression of a creative genius, and it can form new ideas out of already existing ones, but it can also create something out of nothing. It connects the creator to the source of everything. Not only is the imagination a creative force but it is closely connected to nature. Imagination is the power of nature, and it has been present since the beginning of time. Romantics equalize the power of the imagination with the power of the universe. Just how the

universe has the power to create, imagination can be used to bring new life. Romantics view imagination how religious people view the divine (Dwyer, 2008).

Principles of Romanticism were the main focus of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries amongst philosophers, politicians, musicians and realms of art; however, poets remain the peak of Romanticism's ideals. It is because poetry is the bond between passion and order (Dwyer, 2008). Poets understand the mysteries of the universe. As Percy Bysshe Shelley put it in his essay *A Defence of Poetry* published in 1840:

“A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not.... A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.... In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves, nor their auditors, are fully aware of the Excellency of poetry, for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness.... No living poet ever arrives at the fullness of his fame...belonging as he does to all time.” (Shelley, 1840, p. 946-948 as cited in Dwyer, 2008)

In the English literature *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge determine the beginning of Romanticism. *Lyrical Ballads* are a collection of poems written individually by Coleridge and Wordsworth. Wordsworth wrote the preface for the *Lyrical Ballads*, and it is a romantic manifesto which formulates the principles of writing poetry. Firstly, poetry results from imagination and emotions play a crucial role in creating it, it depicts an overflow of feelings. Poetry should not be put in contrast to prose but rather to unemotional facts or science. Poetry was often criticized that it does not imitate real life but rather portrays idealistic events and that it was a language of emotion while prose was a language of intelligence. Wordsworth disagrees and finds that poetry originated from passion. He claims that even the earliest poets were motivated by passion to create poetry and writing came naturally to them. The rhythm and figurative language they used was simply the result of passion they felt for events that inspired them. Wordsworth also states that there is no need for poets to use complicated language for the purpose of elevated style. Poets should use ordinary language and then if they are passionate about the object of their writing, this passion will naturally make their language more dignified, with figures and metaphors. Another mark Wordsworth makes about language is that language needs to come spontaneously to the poet. He criticizes the “mechanical adoption” of figures of speech. When a poet creates, the ideas must come to him instinctively and nothing must be forced, or it is not poetry in a true Romantic sense. The intense sensibility and passion, which are so greatly valued in the Romantic era are

precisely what differentiates a poet from an ordinary man, according to Wordsworth. Poets have a special appreciation of the spirit on life and that fire inside them is what makes them special. Finally, poetry is meant to evoke emotional and sensitive sides of the reader. Romantic poetry has a purpose, and that purpose is to get the sympathies of the reader and to get him excited about life and existence. These are Wordsworth's seven principles of creating poetry analyzed by M. H. Abrams (1953). These principles are the backbone of Romantic poetry widely accepted and put into use by the Romantic poets. Wordsworth also believed that the poet was in fact a prophet who had discovered his own truth rather than simply transmitting the truth of other men. As a pantheist, he placed greater value in nature than in other belief systems. It was nature that was people's source of joy and the place where they could encounter God (Vasconcellos, 2010).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the co-author of *Lyrical Ballads* but besides being an extraordinary poet himself he is also one of the greatest literary critics. What makes him different from other literary critics is the fact that he incorporated philosophy into his criticism. He never commented finished poems, but he was rather interested in the creative process and the psychology of the poet which he used to describe it. Just like Wordsworth did in the preface of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he also endeavoured to examine the grounds of writing poetry in his treatise *Biographia Literaria* (1817) which provides insights on the literary criticism and functions as a response to Wordsworth's principles of creating poetry. Thanks to *Biographia Literaria* and the preface of *Lyrical ballads* the difference in literary views of Wordsworth and Coleridge can be observed. (Abrams, 1953).

Coleridge delves into the theory of imagination, which is the main constituent of the first and second part of *Biographia Literaria*. He differentiates between the fancy and the imagination on a philosophical and psychological level. Before Coleridge, the terms "fancy" and "imagination" were mostly used as synonyms. However, just as Wordsworth, Coleridge gives a much greater value to the imagination. Fancy for him determines the 18<sup>th</sup>-century view of the imagination. Fancy does not have the creative power but simply reproduces materials it is presented with. Imagination on the other hand has an active role in the consciousness and it holds the creative power.

There are two different types of imagination for Coleridge, primary imagination, and secondary imagination. Primary imagination is described as a perceptive power of the outside world. It is passive, it simply happens. Humans have senses and through these senses they are able to experience the world. Primary imagination does not require activation of human

consciousness and it happens involuntarily. It is universal, something that everyone possesses, and it cannot be affected. Secondary imagination is as Coleridge himself put it an “echo” of the primary imagination. It is what differentiates true artists from ordinary people. Secondary imagination requires the power of will. It is active and happens in the conscious mind. It takes the perceptions of the external world and creates objects of beauty. It is the foundation for the artistic expression and creation of poetry (Hill, 1983). His relationship with Wordsworth is the main reason why Coleridge even showed interest for the imagination but while Wordsworth was focused only on poetry, Coleridge dealt with theory of imagination as a whole. His work remains to this day a unique contribution to literary theory.

Coleridge also propounded the organic form of poetry. The term organic is closely related to nature, and he compared art to living organisms. Art, just like a plant, grows from a small seed and spontaneously develops, assimilating itself with the rest of the world. This means that art and nature should not be viewed as opposites but rather combined to form an organic unity. As opposed to the mechanic form, he did not believe that a poem needs firm, predetermined structure because it is shaped from within, and created by the power of imagination.

There is another reason why Coleridge is particularly important in regard to Mary Shelley and that is his use of supernaturalism in his poetry. It is known that he was addicted to opium, so his poetic expression was full of vivid colors, mystery and exotic themes. Unlike Wordsworth who preferred themes of nature, Coleridge used supernatural elements and mystical characters. His poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which Mary Shelley was lucky enough to hear recited by Coleridge himself, is known for its supernatural atmosphere. It obviously left a great impact on her as she would be using supernatural elements in her own work later on (Vasconcellos, 2010).

Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley left an indelible mark upon the aesthetic of Romanticism. One of his most notable works in which he gives his own views on the principles of poetry is *A Defence of Poetry*. For Percy, a true poet is a creative individual who uses the power of imagination to get inspired and create. Poets possess a special talent that leads them to create a masterpiece through their imagination and that masterpiece is a reflection of their deep emotions and passion. Shelley claims that poetry has a purpose to discover the hidden beauty of the world that a person would otherwise not be able to see. He noted: “Poetry is ever-accompanied with pleasure and it lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world” (Shelley, 1840 as cited in Burai, 2015). Poets do not simply imitate nature but because they are blessed with the power of imagination they are able to create something completely new: “A great poem

is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight” (Shelley, 1840 as cited in Burai, 2015). According to Shelley the best source of poetry is tragedy. Poetry uncovers a pleasure born out of tragedy which mixes with grief and sorrow, and such work awakens powerful feelings within the reader.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was known for his atheism; he even wrote *The Necessity of Atheism* to prove that God does not exist. However, he often portrays poets, and in addition himself, as prophets. A poet is superior to others and is gifted with special talents and unique abilities. He claims that poets have a sort of divine power, and that they are the embodiment of wisdom. He based this on the power of imagination only poets can have. Poets do not control the power of imagination; they are simply blessed with it and it makes them superior to other people (Burai, 2015).

According to Percy Bysshe Shelley, when poetry is being created, the poet is inspired by the imagination and this idea that is formed inside the poet’s mind is much better than the finished poem presented to the world. A poet is a vessel for the divine power of imagination which differentiates him from others and makes it possible to create extraordinary art. The poet however has little conscious control over the power of imagination, it is something that simply happens. Shelley states that the poet is also an honorable and virtuous person. He repeatedly mentions that a poet should be of “spotless virtue” (Shelley, 1840 as cited in Burai, 2015). Poets not only uncover the beauty of the world, add beauty to things that are not beautiful and make beautiful things even more beautiful, but they are also the keepers of truth. That is why they refrain themselves from revealing the corruptions of society, because such truth can be deformed and present contradictions in the world. Shelley truly believes that poetry makes people better. Poetry is a divine creation full of honorable brilliance and it brings out reader’s sentiment and passion by giving them a magical experience (Burai, 2015).

In his essay *A Defence of Poetry* Percy Bysshe Shelley delineates the poet as a prophet and hero who has divine abilities. A poet can unveil the beauty of the world that cannot be seen by others, and he presents the truth. Blessed with the gift of imagination, a poet rises to a sort of a divine being who can change the world for the better. However, with this kind of power comes great responsibility so a poet has no choice but to carry the burden of enlightening others (Burai, 2015). Like Wordsworth, Shelley also has a particular appreciation for nature as a source of all creativeness. Nature is eternal source of happiness, inspiration and power for Shelley who ascertains a kinship between nature and man. It is not a surprise that Shelley presented poets

with such divine characteristics considering he was himself a poet and this kind of representation goes hand in hand with his strong self-admiration.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's life-long friend, Lord Byron, a Romantic poet who amazed the public with both his exceptional work and extravagant personal life also affected the literary work of Mary Shelley. Byron lived an adventurous life, so adventurous that he was involved in a scandal about his incestuous relationship with his half-sister. He expressed strong criticism towards the first generation of English Romantic poets but ironically, he was the only one who was truly respected in international literary circles. The term Byronic hero refers to the protagonist of a story and it has become an archetype. The first Byronic hero was described in Lord Byron's narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). A Byronic hero is a free individual who is not restrained by the rules of morality and is usually an outsider in the society. He is intelligent and emotionally aware but at the same time angry, prone to vices and usually tormented by something from his past. Byronic hero is portrayed as attractive, and all the men want to be him, and all the women want to be with him, but he is not interested in reciprocating their love. He is a restless rebel of noble descent but is also very rude and lacks manners (Capuana, 2017). Byronic hero is essentially a version of a Romantic hero and portrays Romantic ideals of nonconformism and liberty. He rejects standard social norms and puts himself in the center of his own attention. Lord Byron also had a close relationship with Mary Shelley and the features of his Byronic hero can be recognized in the character of Victor in Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

### **2.3. The fulfilment of the sublime in Romantic prose**

In the era of Romanticism, the idea of the sublime is central in the perception of the world. Edmund Burke wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and presented an in-depth analysis of the sublime. His work gave the English Romantic authors a foundation on which they will base their art. Burke had similar views on the world as the philosophers of empiricism who claimed that the way we perceive the world is determined by our senses. Rationalists were opposed to that way of thinking and for them the only way to acquire the truth is if we rely only on our reason and rationality. In his *Enquiry* Burke explores human passion and he does so by using a scientific method (Court, 2015).



The *Enquiry* begins with Burke discussing some human differences and determining that the difference in taste comes from a social and cultural background in combination with individual experiences. Then he begins to explain his ideas on the sublime which he considers to be our strongest passion. The sublime is based in terror because pain is a much stronger idea than pleasure, particularly the pain which is caused by the fear of death. However, it is not always unpleasant, there is some joy in the sublime. It makes it impossible for our rational mind to continue working and we are overwhelmed by it. This state we find ourselves in when we can no longer rationally think, or the state of astonishment, is even worse when it comes with the sense of obscurity. Obscurity can be physical, losing the sense of seeing clearly, or mental, not being certain in your thoughts. Darkness is regarded as one source of the sublime, and nobody is immune to it. Vastness and infinity are also the sources of the sublime. By infinity Burke means the inability to clearly see something because it makes us unsure of what the thing actually is (Court, 2015).

In the sense of sublime, Burke finds poetry to be the most effective in terms of getting an emotional reaction from the reader. He is particularly fond of the representation of Death in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Not even painters can represent the "terrible uncertainty of things" in a way poetry can. Burke's explanation of the emotional impact that horror and terror as sublime qualities have on people influenced English Gothic literature in the later years of the 19th century, but it was the qualities of obscurity, vastness, and infinity in the sublime that had an earlier and more profound literary influence on the English Romantic poets (Court, 2015).

Mary Shelley uses the sublime through her description of nature in *Frankenstein*. Victor seeks to relate to nature when his worries become overwhelming. His predicament seems small in comparison to the vastness of nature. Nature gives him calmness and a peace of mind when he feels wretched and forlorn. However, nature is a force which humans cannot measure up to. Victor is eventually punished for violating the laws of nature when he bestows life to his creature whom he intended to be beautiful but instead he was terrified when he first saw him. Both Victor and his creature are doomed to a life of misery from the first moment the creature opens his eyes.

As a reaction to the ideas of order in the Neoclassicism, a new literary form emerged from the Romantic prose, the Gothic novel. This literary genre was not getting the respect it deserved and Romantic poets and critics often thought of it as less valuable than other genres. This view of the Gothic novels will be changed by the creator of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley. The literary idea of the Romantic period was to awake emotions and sensibility in the reader and the Gothic

novel accomplished this through terror. Terror is what keeps the reader's attention. What makes Gothic novels special is their devotion to psychological processes. Readers get an insight into the characters' inner worlds through introspection especially when it comes to difficult situations characters find themselves in (Hume, 1969). In the Gothic novel there is a lot of suspense, a lot of shock and terror all in the effort to evoke strong feelings within the reader. The Romantic idea of awakening a powerful emotional reaction was first seen in the Gothic novel. The use of the supernatural in the Gothic novel is frowned upon mostly because it contrasts the idea that art should mimic reality which lacks the supernatural effects, but the goal of the Gothic novel is to remove narrative fiction from reality. Another distinctive characteristic of the Gothic novel is the gloomy, mysterious atmosphere that is meant to involve peoples' imagination which is crucial and to further captivate their attention (Hume, 1969). The use of supernatural elements is meant to provoke this imagination and sensation within the reader.

The Gothic novel can be divided into novel of terror and novel of horror. The novel of terror builds fear based on suspense and dread of what is about to happen. Novels of terror incorporate constant terrible possibilities which keep readers on edge. The reader is presented with many different possible outcomes of the situations characters find themselves in and all of them are dreadful. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* belongs into the category of horror novels which means that the novel is not built on suspense, but the readers are constantly surprised with a series of shocking events. Horror novels introduced characters that are not black or white, they are not either a virtuous hero or an evil villain. One of these characters is Shelley's Victor who while being incredibly smart and talented also makes a grand mistake which could present him as a villain. True horror novels always entice the readership with the complex psychological processes of these characters. To give the reader's imagination complete freedom which is not limited by the conventions of their every-day lives, Gothic novels are set in a different time and place. There is always a morally righteous character which serves as a comparison for the hero-villain of the story who is the main source of all action (Hume, 1969). Even though Romantic poets look down on the Gothic novel, the Gothic novel evinces the Romantic ideas with its determination to provoke a strong sensible reaction from the reader.

One of the founders of Gothic fiction and Gothic novel is Ann Radcliffe. Many literary critics hold Radcliffe to the highest regard and praise her work, even calling her "the Shakespeare of Romantic writers" (Townshend, 2014). Even though she wrote poetry and travelogues today she is most well known for her Gothic novels, particularly *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Ann Radcliffe was always considered the one writer of the Gothic novels who

created valuable literary pieces, even though the Romantic authors and critics found the Gothic novel inferior to other Romantic literary forms. *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole is considered to be the first Gothic literary work; however, Radcliffe's work became known as the embodiment of the perfect Gothic form and atmosphere. Radcliffe amazingly combined her skills of creating terror and visuals of natural landscapes which readers love (Townshend, 2014).

In her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826) Radcliffe is the one who differentiates between "terror" and "horror". She argues that terror and horror are the opposites in that "the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (Radcliffe, 1826, p. 149). Radcliffe's novels are terror novels more so than horror novels. Inspired by Edmund Burke and his ideas on the sublime, her novels are built on the terrifying psychological suspense and a sense of mystery and obscurity. Radcliffe's use of supernatural was different than that of other Gothic author as she gave natural explanations for supernatural events in her stories. She incorporates action which seems to be otherworldly but eventually she gives a rational explanation for it. She abandoned this technique in her last novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826). Radcliffe also embodied the so-called female Gothic. This literary tradition is focused on the way women authors had used their writing to explore and criticize the position of women within the patriarchy. As the originator of this literary movement, Radcliffe did not only inspire proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft but also female fiction writers as Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë. (Townshend, 2014).

### **3. *Frankenstein, the overreacher***

The story of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was first published in 1818. It was published again in 1831 with slight adjustments. In the second version of the novel there is a preface written and signed by Mary Shelley herself in which she explains how the novel came to be. In the second preface she also states that the first one was entirely written by her husband. In his preface Percy Bysshe Shelley touches on the events which lead to the creation of *Frankenstein*. He mentions a scientist Erasmus Darwin and because Mary Shelley drew inspiration from scientific theories it is precisely what gives her novel the elements of science-fiction and makes it one of the first in history with such form. He wrote it as it was the author

of the novel who was actually writing it. The first edition was published anonymously but the second edition gave Mary the credit she deserved as a talented female writer. The second edition also has more chapters than the first edition which makes it easier for the readers to understand the author's intent and different characters' point of view. In her preface Mary wanted to explain how such a young girl came up with the terrifying tale of *Frankenstein*. She expresses that as the daughter of two distinguished writers she always wanted to write herself and her husband also wanted her to prove herself. When she and her husband visited Switzerland, they were neighbours to Lord Byron. During one rainy night when they had to stay indoors, Byron came up with the idea that they should each write a ghost story. Mary wanted to write something terrifying and dreadful which would in her words: "make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (*Frankenstein*, Preface). She did not come up with anything for some time but then one night after hearing Percy and Byron talk about experiments of Dr. Erasmus Darwin, an image of a student kneeling next to his horrendous creation came into her mind. At first, she wanted to write a short story, but her husband urged her to create something longer. That is the story of how Marry Shelley's "hideous progeny" came to be.

The novel consists of framing devices, basically stories within stories. The novel starts with Robert Walton's letters to his sister. This frames the story Victor tells Walton about the creation of the monster. Victor's story is then framing for the monster's story about his difficulties and monster's story is a framing for the life story of De Lacey family that he considers his protectors. The novel begins with Walton's letters in which he is telling his sister about his adventures. He is writing to her about a man called Victor Frankenstein his crew found nearly dead sailing through freezing waters. Victor was raised in Geneva alongside Elizabeth who was adopted by Victor's parents to save her from the life of poverty. He was always very bright and when it was time, he was sent away to the university of Ingolstadt to study science. By studying dead bodies Victor acquires knowledge needed to give life to inanimate objects and ultimately creates his monster. Only when the monster was given the gift of life had Victor realized what he had done, and he abandoned the monster. The monster escaped and years would pass before Victor saw him again. One day he got a letter from his father asking him to return home because his little brother was found dead. Victor knows who the killer is because he sees his monster in the woods when he travels back home. However, he cannot confess to his family and their housekeeper Justine is wrongly accused and murdered. The monster finds Victor and demands of him to listen to his story. Because of his appearance he was rejected by

the society and humans always tried to hurt him. He hid himself in the cottage of De Lacey family and learned their story. Even though he considered De Lacey family his protectors they as well rejected him. The monster now wants Victor to create a female version of him and promises that he will be gone forever if Victor agrees. Eventually Victor changes his mind and refuses to create another monster. Enraged by this, the monster kills Elizabeth on their wedding night and Victor vows to hunt the monster and kill him or die trying. He was after him near the Arctic Circle when Walton found him. The story ends with Victor dying and the monster disappearing.

Mary Shelley was heavily influenced by the ideas of Romanticism and many Romantic concepts are employed in her novel, but *Frankenstein* is much more complex and ambiguous as a vein of reconsidering the Romantic rhetoric. While Romantic poets were seeking the sublime, they did it through personalization. In most of their poems the reader cannot differentiate between the speaker and the author. Usually, they are one and the same. Mary Shelley presents an attempt to achieve the sublime in *Frankenstein*, but this attempt is not her own, she is not the narrator of the story. Victor Frankenstein is the agent on a quest trying to create life out of dead tissue in his laboratory:

“A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.” (*Frankenstein*, p. 66)

Romantic authors viewed imagination as a divine power able to create. They also believed that imagination makes this world better and rises humanity to a new level. In that sense Victor is a true Romantic hero, he believes that he is doing something to help humanity, something that will change the world for the better (Smith, 2011).

Nature plays an important part in *Frankenstein*, just like it is crucial for most Romantic authors. From the very beginning of the novel and all throughout there are detailed representations of the surroundings the characters find themselves in. Descriptions of nature are like a mirror, they either reflect the inner state of the character or contradict it. For example, when Victor is describing Switzerland, his home country, he describes it as colorful, with blue lakes and bright blue sky because he spent a happy childhood with a loving family there. Orkneys, the place where he intended to create a mate for his monster has a much darker description, with barren and rough lands. He even compares the light breeze of Switzerland with strong destructive winds of Orkneys to further emphasize his opposite feelings towards

the two places. The two settings convey the difference between the human world and the monster's world. The monster copes with the dark and rough surroundings and difficult conditions, while the human world is beautiful. These reflections of characters' inner worlds in nature will be present throughout the novel (Smith, 2011).

Romanticism did evolve as a stylistic formation in response to the boundaries set by Neoclassicism, and the Romantics act as notorious rebels against any kind of limitations set on human lives. This notion can also be followed in *Frankenstein*. Victor is pushing his boundaries as a human and a creator with trying to alive an inanimate object. He is playing God with his experiment as no other human has ever successfully realized something like that. Putting himself in a position of God gives the first clue that his work will have horrible consequences. Victor was very bright, and he already was the best in his class, highly praised by his professors, but that was not enough for him. Instead of becoming a respected scientist Victor decided to accomplish something no one did before and overcome the limitations of humanity. He is not a mad scientist, as popular culture is portraying him, but an individual in search for the perfect human, scientific ideal. He ends up creating a monster. Shelley wants to show to the reader that nothing created by humans can ever be perfect and that there is no such thing as perfection (Smith, 2011). Victor is not the only one who wants to overstep his boundaries. His monster wishes to achieve a connection with other humans, in fact he is desperate for acceptance. His appearance and his inability to speak the human language at first make it impossible for him to find someone who will not be afraid of him. This leads him to start hating on humans and to crave revenge upon his creator and people who reject him and hurt him: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend." (*Frankenstein*, p. 125). Even though there are many supernatural and fictional elements to this novel, it is in fact an allegory for real, natural feeling and difficulties Romantic writers were so involved in (Smith, 2011).

In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley is subtly criticizing the position of women in the patriarchal society. Literary work gave women the power to express their disapproval of different aspects of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so the most important work by women of that era is in a form of critique (Dwyer, 2008). She was often criticized that her female characters lack her mother's sense of feminism and that they represent female characteristic that the male-dominated society considers to be ideal. If we look at the women in *Frankenstein*, they truly are written based on the ideal that women should be beautiful, gentle, well behaved and that their only purpose in life is to serve others. The characters of Justine and Elizabeth are completely selfless, domestic, and devoted to men around them. Justine accepts her fate of

being wrongfully accused of murder and takes the blame for another without even properly defending herself. Elizabeth is described as the ideal of female beauty:

Her hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features. (*Frankenstein*, p. 42)

These women are very passive and domesticated, giving and obeying without question. But the way Shelley portrays these women has a purpose. No matter how idealistic they are and how obliging and caring, they always end up dying prematurely. They are set in these cultural norms that make them completely helpless and in the end that is what kills them. This is the point Mary Shelley is trying to make and she seemingly wrote such “anti-feminist” characters (Dwyer, 2008). Shelley wanted to express the imbalance between men and women in the society she lived in, typical for the Romantic age. She is criticizing the world in which only men are thinking agents. This is shown through the character of Victor who has the power to create life completely on his own, thus disregarding women as unnecessary.

Another example of the suppressed female sexual energy is the fact that the only truly intimate relationships Victor has are with other men: Walton continually expresses his admiration of Victor in his letters and nurtures him in his last days, Henry Clerval has been Victor’s friend since childhood and they have much love for each other, and his relationship with his monster is the main theme of the novel. The relationships with female characters are almost incestual. For example, Elizabeth grew up with Victor and they repeatedly refer to each other as cousins, yet eventually they marry. Shelley criticizes this male fear of female sexuality and in the end this female energy saves Walton from having the same fate as Victor as he sails back home thanks to his sister (Mellor, 2006).

When Victor is first introduced, he seems to have all the qualities of a true Romantic hero, however, it soon turns out that it is quite the opposite. He is obsessed with science and gaining knowledge, but when he eventually does succeed in creating new life, he completely abandons it and refuses to accept any responsibility for the monster he had created. Shelley is not trying to say here how women should be treated as equals but rather she points out the disasters that happens when it is not done so. The horror of Victor’s fate is what happens when

the world is deprived of true feminine power. She is not trying to say that feminine is superior to masculine either but that the masculine cannot exist without the feminine, they need to be in balance and work together (Dwyer, 2008). Her approach does not unravel as feminist but rather humanistic.

Victor's narcissistic obsession with knowledge and creation leads him to accept cultural norms which place him above the rest of the humanity. No human can be above Nature and its creative processes because Victor himself is a result of that creation. Shelley does not only present her views of feminism in this novel, but she is also exploring Romantic imagination which is a central ideal in the Romantic period. She agrees with some of the views of Romanticism and shares them with her husband and Lord Byron. She accepts the Romantic sensibility and believes that imagination is creation, just like her father did before her. This idea that the human mind can rise above everything else in the universe and that it is a measure of intelligence is fundamentally destructive. Mary was aware of this, and she knew that in order to ensure the survival of humanity and the world in general we need to realize something that Victor did not and that is that every human ability including imagination and creation as well as our intellect and capability to nurture, is a result of the creative power of the universe (Dwyer, 2008).

According to Dwyer (2008) the two points Mary Shelley makes are mutually supportive. If we continue to ignore and oppress the feminine, eventually it will lead to a disaster. This does not mean that we should give feminine the superiority but rather that we need to bring feminine and masculine in balance. It is necessary to achieve this cultural balance otherwise we are risking the failure of humanity. Imagination in the Romantic sense is crucial for achieving this balance.

Ellen Moers, a literary critic, defined the already mentioned term Female Gothic as the literary legacy from women since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Mary Shelley is one of its most important representatives with her novel *Frankenstein*. Another feminine topic that is explored in this novel is the one of birth. Mary Shelley was often pregnant since the age of sixteen but unfortunately most of her babies died during or shortly after birth. The story of *Frankenstein* is also a metaphorical story of birth; however, birth is not considered a beautiful event in *Frankenstein*. Victor abandons his monster the moment he was created. According to Moers (1976) this is the most powerful and feminine moment in the entire novel. Victor is repulsed by newborn life and there is a lot of guilt and fear surrounding the idea of "birth":



“How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.” (*Frankenstein*, p. 70)

Many parts in the novel deal precisely with the trauma Victor is facing of the afterbirth. Most women experience feelings of depression and fear after giving birth, but the society expects a woman to be happy and overjoyed, filled with love from the first time she holds her baby. This is the representation of birth in our culture even to this day. The process of birth is horrendous in *Frankenstein*, and it begins before the monster takes his first breath. In order to achieve his goal and to give life to something lifeless, Victor is studying corpses and collecting different parts of the human body to launch his creation. Just like in Victor’s workshop, Mary Shelley’s life was also greatly affected by life and death, and they were intertwined. Besides her numerous pregnancies and deaths of her children, she also had to deal with deaths of her half-sister and her mother (Moers, 1976). A theme which is consistent in *Frankenstein* and again can relate to Mary Shelley’s own life is Victor’s complete failure as a parent. He is disgusted by his creature from the moment he is born because of his appearance and his size. The monster is desperate for a family and his first victim, William, will be a child he at first tried to adopt. Mary named this character William like her son who unfortunately passed away and this gives us an insight into her own anxieties about motherhood (Mellor, 2006).

Mary Shelley did put much of herself and her experiences into her work, some critics even say that *Frankenstein* has some autobiographical elements. Mary calling her novel her “hideous progeny” could have an interesting meaning behind it and many literary critics gave their opinion on it. Mellor (2006) explains that Mary is referring to her book as her baby. With this novel she is giving birth to herself as a writer. She was fearful of becoming an author but not because she was a woman in a male-dominated field, but rather because of her father’s and husband’s expectations that she would become a great writer like her mother. When Byron proposed the idea of writing a story, she was anxious about writing, but she was also anxious because she could not think of an idea. According to Mellor “she feared the trauma of

barrenness as much as the trauma of birth” (Mellor, 2006, p. 11). Dates in the novel, on Walton’s letters to his sister, mirror the dates of Mary’s own conception and birth.

Johnson (1982) claims that as Mary was trying to live up to her parents and “give birth to herself” as an author she needed to seize the role of the parent which resulted in a metaphorical matricide. Mary Shelley did not only have difficulties with herself as a mother but also with herself as a daughter. Frankenstein’s creature tells him that he will be with him on his wedding night when Victor refuses to create him a female companion. Similarly, Mary Shelley was with her parents on their wedding night as they only got married because her mother was pregnant with her. This eventually led to the death of Mary’s mother just as Victor’s wedding night terminated with the death of Elizabeth. The whole story of Frankenstein’s monster could be seen as metaphor for a life with one parent who abandons you just how Mary felt abandoned by her own father (Johnson, 1982):

“I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on.” (*Frankenstein*, p. 277)

The ideas about education, society, politics that we can find in *Frankenstein* are the result of the influence of her parents. She was immersed in the literary genius of her husband Percy and other contemporary Romantic authors. She was reading Wordsworth and Coleridge and was close friends with Lord Byron. Because she was a woman and because she was so young when she wrote something so brilliant as *Frankenstein* it was a general thought that she was simply a medium through which other people’s ideas are being formed into a literary work. It was believed that she was projecting ideas instead of being an independent author (Moers, 1976). Moers (1976) firmly disagrees with these statements and in her work *Literary Women* determines how even if we do not consider *Frankenstein* to be a great novel it is definitely an original one. She agrees though that *Frankenstein* belongs to the literature of overreacher, someone who is trying to cross the human boundaries. The overreachers in the Romantic sense are so focused on their work because they are trying to achieve benefits and prolongations of their own life while Victor is obsessed with creating new life: “He defies mortality not by living forever but by giving birth” (Moers, 1976, p. 95). Moers concludes that the reason why Mary was able to think of something so hideous was precisely because she was a young mother.

Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert wrote a book called *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) in which they interpret female characterization in books written by male and female authors. They express the idea that every female character delineated by a male author can be fit in one

of the two categories: they are either good and pure or rebellious. They analyzed the portrayal of women in novels written by women, one of them being Mary Shelley. According to Gubar and Gilbert female authors were frustrated with that misogynistic stereotype, and it influenced their writing greatly. Gubar and Gilbert compare *Frankenstein* to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and refer to it as a female interpretation because they believe that *Frankenstein* is in fact a feminist novel despite its main three characters being male. Victor, Walton, and the monster are somewhat representations of Shelley because they are trying to find their place in the fallen world. The creature complains of this to Frankenstein saying:

“I was dependent on none and related to none. The path of my departure was free, and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them.”  
(*Frankenstein*, p. 160)

In *Paradise Lost* Adam falls from heaven to Earth. In *Frankenstein* the three characters fall from the Earth into hell. Victor is compared to Adam, Eve and Satan as he manifests certain characteristics of each one. Victor is trying to play God which evokes Milton's Satan. Victor wants to be the creator of new life and master of a completely new race which are God-like qualities. Satan was punished for his wish to take over God's role and for his wish to acquire forbidden knowledge. Victor was likewise punished for his creation which resulted from his ambition to overstep his own limits. He was doomed to a life of suffering and fear. Walton also has some similarities to Milton's Satan as he is driven by the same ambition as Victor, in fact the reason why Victor is telling him his story is to prevent him from having the same hellish ending. There is another similarity relating to Mary Shelley herself.

The monster acquires education while hiding with the De Lacey family and everything he learns he learns from them. He reads books like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Plutarch's Lives* to make him more human and help him learn about the world he is alienated from. This is very similar to the education Mary was getting from her husband and other male Romantic authors like Byron. Most days she would sit with them and listen to their conversations about literature, politics etc. The books the monster was reading were also on her own reading list given to her by Percy. She was in a sense alienated as a woman in a male-dominated society just like the monster was rejected from the human world because of his appearance. Gubar and Gilbert further claim that there is a parallel between the monster's appearance and the male loathing of the female body. The monster is nameless just like Mary

might have felt as a pregnant, unwed woman in a society that deems women as unworthy for everything men are praised for.

There is an obvious critique of science in *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley came up with the idea of the scientist from the work of Humphry Davy, Erasmus Darwin, and Luigi Galvani. She took certain aspects of their work, and they served as inspiration for her character Victor. From Davy's work she used chemical terminology and the idea that a scientist changes the beings around him. Because of Erasmus Darwin she concluded that a good scientist should not attempt to change nature but rather watch it closely and try to understand it. Victor is a bad scientist because he is trying to create new species instead of it naturally evolving and because he downgrades his creature instead of perfecting it by using both human and animal parts to form it. Galvani was known for his work with electricity, so it was an inspiration for Victor's experiment. Mary Shelley is giving a strong critique of the scientific revolution which desires to acquire the objective truth regardless of the consequences. Frankenstein wants to appropriate nature's greatest power, the female ability for reproduction and make it his own (Mellor, 2006). As Mary Shelley put it, scientists:

“... penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.” (*Frankenstein*, p. 59)

Victor does not see Nature as a living organism but rather something he can succumb to his own will through science. His egotism is the direct opposite of Nature as he wishes to claim the role of God. Victor fails, but not only because his creature turns into a monster but also because Nature seems to be fighting back. Victor becomes sick after his experiment; his mind and body start to deteriorate rapidly, and he dies at the age of twenty-five. Nature denied him the ability to create a normal being because he is not a woman and does not possess the feminine energy and maternal instincts need for creation (Mellor, 2006).

The novel proposes a complex philosophical question: what is human nature? The creature claims that he was good, that in his core he is benevolent and that the only reason why he did such horrendous things was because of the way his maker and other members of society treated him. Victor on the other hand has an entirely different opinion. He claims that the creature is evil and that it is simply in his nature to act like that:

“Abhorred monster! fiend that thou art! the tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil!” (*Frankenstein*, p. 65-66, as cited in Mellor, 2006)

Mary wants the readers to understand that there are moral consequences to the ways we perceive the world. In the novel all people view something unfamiliar to them as evil and terrifying. Eventually it led to an absolute disaster (Mellor, 2006). Mary suggests that if we perceive the creature as a monster while we read her novel, we become the creators of evil. Victor and his monster become one and the same through the novel. Victor himself says that he sometimes thought of his creature as his own spirit. This idea is further emphasized by both Victor and the monster being associated with Milton’s Satan and Adam. Their unity becomes especially clear during the final chapter when Victor is trying to hunt his creation down. Victor was the one being tormented by the monster throughout the novel but in the final chapter the roles are reversed. The creature even leaves food for Victor so that they can meet again. They both want to take revenge, they both feel remorse for what they have done, and they are both desperate by the end. Today most people refer to the monster when they say “Frankenstein” even though it is the name of the creator, but it works well because it reveals the truth of their relationship (Mellor, 2006).

Mary Shelley criticizes the idea of Romantic imagination that is so highly regarded by the Romantic poets. Her idea is that such unconstrained imagination would create something based on fear, not love. When we think of something unfamiliar to us as monstrous we enable evil to be formed. By evil Shelley is thinking of everything wrong in the society like gender inequality, racism, and all other prejudice (Mellor, 2006, p. 23).

#### **4. *Valperga*: the annihilative power of ambition**

*Valperga or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* is Mary Shelley’s second novel. In this novel, she uses fantasy elements but still the novel is focused on the characters’ pragmatic and logical reality. It is based on Castruccio Castracani, a real historical figure who conquered Florence. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Italy two parties, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines developed a rivalry as the Guelph supported the Pope while the Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman Emperor. This rivalry is the main source of conflict in *Valperga* which proves how much research went into this novel. Dante Alighieri belonged with the White Guelphs, and there are allusions to Dante through the creation of the prophetic

Beatrice. It was first published in 1823 and it serves as a critique of the destructive imbalance between masculine and feminine ideologies. The main idea of the novel is to present how destructive ambition and masculine egotism can be (White, 1997).

The novel follows Castruccio, a conqueror, much like Napoleon in Shelley's lifetime, who is trying to claim Valperga, a fortress that is governed by Euthanasia, Castruccio's one true love. Castruccio aims for power and glory and military domination. He is very charismatic, lucky, and successful which properties enable him to achieve his goal. He gains the world but the price he must pay is his soul. To attain what he desires, Valperga must be destroyed, but that is also the home of Euthanasia, the only woman he ever loved. Also, he must make Italy an armed camp and, in those conditions, other values like love and family have no place in his life. In his obsessive lust for power, Castruccio attracts a deceitful, evil man and horror wages with war. He wishes to assume all control over Italy and refuses to acknowledge any limits to his ambition. He is not willing to quit but nevertheless he wants to marry his love Euthanasia. Euthanasia admits that she loves him too, but she explains she cannot be with him if he pursues his goal for power. Castruccio will never do that, so she finds herself joining his conspirators and turns against him. Her cohorts are captured and betrayed, and they are all executed, except for Euthanasia. She is exiled to Sicily, but on the way there, the ship sinks and she dies along with the crew. Castruccio eventually dies in one of his endless battles as well. This novel tries to envision how cravings for power can only result in pain and suffering (Mambrol, 2019).

The novel makes a part of the European Romanticism's commentary on the aesthetics of male Romanticism, without going back to the neoclassical poetic ideals of the eighteenth century. There are many different works of poetry and prose by women such as Charlotte Smith, Anna Barbauld, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Shelley, Jane Taylor, and Felicia Hemans which provide the criticism of the male ideologies of Romanticism (White, 1997). Mary Shelley is amongst those women and through her novels she continually reconsiders different aspects of the Romantic theory of creation. One of those novels and an attempt of critique is *Valperga*, a novel in which Shelley deliberately and explicitly designs a plot based on her view on the political and social equivalents of the prevailing cultural values and images of her time, in the way she defined them (White, 1997). White (1997) argues that she will say nothing against Romanticism but rather help the readers to understand Shelley's perception of a specific Romantic aesthetic, which he defined as an aesthetic of lust and desire, and which is reflected in Mary's novelistic depiction of its consequences and nature. The ideologies of gender in *Valperga* are not at all simple. Different

aspects of social life like political views, social dynamics, relations between different classes are valued according to sublime images of power and desire demonstrated by the masculine. *Valperga* should be viewed as a feminine criticism of masculine intoxication with power and desire in the period of Romanticism. It is a criticism of the fact that during the period in which Mary Shelley lived the contradictions of gender were not resolved just like those of international politics (White, 1997).

Just like in *Frankenstein* the main problem in *Valperga* is the masculine desire and ambition. It led Victor to ruin, and the same imaginative ambition will be the cause of destruction in *Valperga* as well. It is a dramatic story about love and ambition but under the surface it actually portrays the dynamics of gender and power in Shelley's contemporary society. Castruccio's education and his ambitions since the age of eleven represent the male subjectivity of Romantic authors. His desire for vengeance turns into desire for domination and he who was once banished from his own home will eventually become the tyrant contributing to the never-ending circle of liberty and tyranny. Mary suggests that such cycles can be found in poems of Romantic poets. Despite the poems' opposition to such histories, there is an aspect of their aesthetics through which their depictions of the sublime reaffirm the principles of personal aspirations that uphold cyclical patterns of political and social dominance. Mary Shelley relates egotism and ambition with Romantic authors and her character Castruccio is a representative of the male Romantic paradigm. Castruccio's early wish to transcend mortality leads to political and social destructive expressions and an egoistic emptiness for which Shelley tells us it is the danger of masculine Romantic desire, hollow because it is not capable to acknowledge human and alternative ideology under its own circumstances, offered by Euthanasia. The character of Euthanasia on the other hand is inspired by Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She is independent, self-sufficient, and that change can be achieved gradually through universal love. There is a perfect balance between her sweet looks and her wisdom. Euthanasia eventually fails, which shows how such an individual cannot succeed in existing situation and she embodies the critique of existing order. Because of social and political destruction, the two main relationships in the novel bring only destruction (White, 1997).

The portrayal of Beatrice is also interesting. Some say that she is the representation of what happens when one uncritically embraces the desire to possess a divine power which is the essence of Romantic imagination. She is a metaphor for a male Romantic poet who believes that he alone possesses the creative power of imagination which puts him in a God-like position.

However, White (1997) argues that calling Beatrice a male Romantic poet is a paradox since this term refers to a set of ideals associated with a male poet, not female. Beatrice is supposed to be a vessel in which part of God's spirit resides. She eventually resigns this position to become Castruccio's mistress thus replacing one false deity with another. She never realizes Shelley's message that associating divine creative powers with humans always leads to a disaster. Beatrice was captured and tortured for three years by a being that she refers to as a human and as a demon. She bespeaks Shelley's views on the relationship between Romantic aesthetic and the mechanisms of power. The masculine power creates illusions of its own divinity in others that it dominates. Castruccio and the man who tortures Beatrice both attempt to gain this divine power, but their only success is managing to represent themselves like deities to people like Beatrice who accept this representation of masculine power. The usual fate of such characters in Shelley's novels is death (White, 1997).

The character of Euthanasia differs from Beatrice in terms of accepting this masculine ideology of power. Euthanasia's love for Castruccio which gradually fades in the presence of more important things, represents the liberation of the female mind from the illusions the masculine power enforced on it. The initial divine belief Euthanasia has of Castruccio cannot survive because of her political views. She refuses to give any value to Romantic notions such as honour, fame, the sublime and the beautiful because she thinks they need to be viewed in regard to the consequences of political ideology from which they originate. Shelley here proposes a different ideology, one of peace that would ultimately replace tyranny with liberty. Euthanasia separates love for an individual from the political and social conditions. Shelley puts Beatrice and Euthanasia as opposites: while Beatrice is blinded by divinity, she sees in Castruccio, Euthanasia is able to see him for what he truly is even though she loves him. Euthanasia joins Castruccio's enemies and eventually she dies, unable to pull the masculine figure from his position of power. With her death there is no feminine left in the novel and without the feminine all the world is left with is the constant masculine wars of ambition and power (White, 1997).

The beginning of *Valperga* dwells mainly on the pain and suffering of those affected by the war. Castruccio's uprising and power is built on top of victims and bodies piled up in his uprising to supremacy, but still, Shelley does not allow that uprising to stay unchecked. Using characters like Euthanasia or characters like Francis Guinigi, we can see what destruction and devastation of war bring to the people and the land they own. When Beatrice first appears on the front line of Italian politics, the focus is shifted from the typical perspective of violence to detailed



research of the mechanisms in which suffering makes its victims unable to speak on a very individualized and personal level. Beatrice's character is used by Shelley as a way to explore the significance of emotional and mental pain, expressing that this type of pain and torture is much more debilitating than the physical one (Maunu, 2010). The role of Beatrice's suffering is specific. Beatrice asks the Inquisitors to test her, as her role of the God's handmaiden has been questioned. Her intentions are pure, but with her prophecies, which are not sanctioned by the Church, she displays an influential power over the people and that makes the Inquisitors fear her. Just like Euthanasia, who also has an immense power over others, Beatrice is a threat to the Inquisitors, because she embodies the female power. When the Judgment Day arrives, attention is set strongly not only to the influence Beatrice has over the folk, but also to the amount of violence that is connected to her from the very start (Maunu, 2010):

“The square presented a busy, but awful scene ... the people were admitted, while it was guarded on the inside by Gascon soldiers, that with drawn swords kept in awe the eager spectators, whose fury of hope and fear approached madness ... their bodies and muscles were in perpetual motion; some foamed at the mouth, and others gazed with outstretched necks, and eyes starting from their sockets.” (*Valperga*, p. 220 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Shelley evinces what is about to take place. Even though we can feel the tension building up for the upcoming Judgement Day, the event itself is short. The almost crazy state of mind of the crowd increases even more when the monks appear who:

“Bore ploughshares and torches, mattocks and other instruments, that again spread a groan of horror through the multitude. The pyre was lighted; the shares thrown in among the blazing wood; while other monks threw up the soil of the inclosure [sic] with their mattocks, forming six furrows, two feet distant one from the other.” (*Valperga*, p. 222 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

The reader is aware that Beatrice's followers and protectors have falsely set up the Judgment and that she is not to be harmed, although the emotions caused by the passage here move the reader along, so intense, that the crowd's ignorance has little or no matter at all. Not to confuse the reader, this was still a torture scene, clearly depicted by the monks polishing their weapons, highlighting what is soon going to happen to Beatrice. We can also feel the tension, when Castruccio looks at Beatrice walking over the fiery ground, a very important point made by Shelley, a connection of the scene with her interpretation of the violence and pain in *Valperga* as a whole (Maunu, 2010). Just one day before the Judgement is about to take place, the bishop

tells Castruccio about the rigged prosecution and that Beatrice's safety is guaranteed, but Castruccio still feels fear:

“He thought of the beauty of the prophetess, her animation and numberless graces, until he almost believed in the divinity of her mission: but he shuddered with horror, when he reflected upon her danger, that her ivory feet should press the burning iron, that, if she fell, she would fall on the hot metal, and expire in misery, while the priests, the accursed, self-constituted distributors of God’s justice, would sing hymns of triumph over her untimely and miserable fate ...” (*Valperga*, p. 217 as cited in Maunu, 2010).

Even though everything should be safe, Shelley creates a mood of uncertainty, a mood of horror and we are not sure what is about to happen. Castruccio reacts asking himself what if something is not as it should be, and Beatrice is harmed. The monks eventually order her to walk over the fiery wood:

“Every heartbeat fast; Castruccio overcome by uncontrollable pity, would have darted forth to save her, but someone held him back; and in a moment, before the second beating of his heart, before he again drew breath, horror was converted to joy and wonder. Beatrice, her eyes covered, her arms bound, her feet bare, passed over the burning shares with a quick light step, and reaching the opposite barrier, fell on her knees, uttering an exclamation of thanksgiving to God.” (*Valperga*, p. 223 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Shelley emphasizes the way Castruccio feels concern for her safety. The reader can feel it one breath to another, one heartbeat to another, and the reason Shelley gives us such a suspense is to connect us with the feelings of the characters. Even though Castruccio is aware that the Judgement is fake, and Beatrice will not suffer, his worrying is so credible that readers can feel the tortures Beatrice undergoes. Castruccio's anxiety and suspense bring out the fear of the experience of torture in the readers. Castruccio's reaction shows that pain, real or just potential, presents an enormous threat to the human psyche (Maunu, 2010). After the Judgement, Castruccio is drawn even more to Beatrice, because of her unreachability and her universal admiration of the crowd. When Beatrice falls for Castruccio, the power he holds remains stronger in his favour. She believes it was God who connected them because she knows nothing about the Judgement being rigged and Castruccio uses her innocence and pureness of heart. Castruccio’s power over Beatrice turns violent and at one point he decides to abandon her, drawn to his wish to rule the people (Maunu, 2010):

“he was obliged to undeceive her; and the hand, that tore away the ties her trusting heart had bound round itself, at the same time tore away the veil which had for her invested all nature, and shewed her life as it was – naked and appalling.” (*Valperga*, p. 241 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

The pain that Beatrice feels is mental and emotional, but Shelley portrays it in terms of physical reaction. Those terms are emphasized by Shelley, so that the reader can perceive the damage done emotionally is just as forceful and debilitating as physical pain (Maunu, 2010). Once the relationship had ended, Beatrice mostly disappears for nine chapters, until she finally returns with a major function in Shelley's meditation on suffering and violence in society. With Beatrice's integration into the story, we witness that Shelley's work goes beyond an antiwar novel and that is in fact a deeper reflection on violence and suffering and a vivid metaphor for torture and war's effect on society's connection to violence (Maunu, 2010). Shelley walks us through religious and political torture to scenes of emotional damaging of Beatrice from her love Castruccio, and to the final scene of sexualized torture that drives Beatrice to madness. Throughout the story, Beatrice progresses to a more severe state of pain, even though she is not in any real danger, her believing in it causes her suffering to expand, and with Castruccio abandoning her, her pain becomes so intense it is physical. At that point she decides to leave her home, leave the past behind. The question then asked is how is her torture connected to the images or war linked to Castruccio? Why is her pain amplified, yet the war pain remains in the shadow? The end of Beatrice's story provides the answer (Maunu, 2010).

Euthanasia is represented as a promoter of peace, the voice of the abused and the victims (Maunu, 2010). The longest passages in *Valperga* about the consequences of war and destruction are depicted by Euthanasia, who informs Castruccio, just after his great victory of Montecatini, that

“A hatred and fear of war is therefore a strong and ruling passion in my heart ... Florence is my native city; its citizens are bound to me by the ties of consanguinity and friendship ...” (*Valperga*, p. 153 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Using the word “consanguinity” marks the blood bond valuable as human ties, all the blood spilled by Castruccio, with no remark at all to all the human lives perished in the wars he wages. Euthanasia emphasizes the cost of war, shown in a scene when she must make a decision whether or not to call upon her people to protect her castle against the oppressor Castruccio and

his army (Maunu, 2010). While trying to comfort Laretta, before the attack, Euthanasia explains to her that soldiers during war are stripped of all humanity and have no decency:

“Even if Castruccio were at the head of the troops, he would in vain endeavor to restrain their fury; a triumphant soldier is worse than the buffalo of the forest, and no humanity can check his thirst for blood and outrage ...” (*Valperga*, p. 349 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Euthanasia creates an image with a sharp contrast when describing the siege of Montecatini. Even one of the soldiers following her says “every drop of blood that warms my heart ... [is] devoted to your cause” (*Valperga*, p. 345 as cited in Maunu, 2010). After the conclusion of the battle, “Euthanasia wept when she heard of the blood that had been spilt for her” and while talking to herself she says:

“I have done infinite evil, in spilling blood whose each precious drop was of more worth than the jewels of a kingly crown ...” (*Valperga*, p. 359 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Castruccio as a character ignores the price of war, but Euthanasia is well aware of that burden, providing spaces in the novel for critiques of war. Her words represent an alternative view of masculine drama of war. It is believed that Shelley thought of war as the last resort when confronted with a tyrant. Castruccio's power increases constantly during the novel, yet Euthanasia continues to try to convince him that war has a destructive nature (Maunu, 2010). For example, when Castruccio stands ready to attack Florence, Euthanasia offers herself in attempt to bargain to avoid war:

“fight the Florentines with words only, and I am still yours. But more than I love Florence, or myself, or you, Castruccio, do I love peace; and my heart bleeds to think that the cessation of bloodshed and devastation which our poor distracted country now enjoys is to be of short duration ... Have you not lived in a country suffering from war? Have you not seen the peasants driven from their happy cottages, their vines torn up, their crops destroyed, often a poor child lost, or haplessly wounded, whose every drop of blood is of more worth than the power of the Cæsars? ... The bubble is yours, Castruccio. – What would you have? Honour, fame, dominion? What are these if peace do not purchase them, but contempt, infamy, and despotism! ... As the enemy of Florence I will never be yours; as the deliberate murderer of the playmates of my infancy, of the friends of my youth, of those to whom I am allied by every tie of relationship and hospitality that binds mankind, as such, I will never be yours. Here then

is the crown of your work ... do not follow these; do not be sanguinary like them ... Pardon me that I speak to you in this strain. From this moment we are disjoined; whatever our portions may be, we take them separately. Such is the sentence you pronounce upon us.” (*Valperga*, p. 284 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

Euthanasia sacrifices her happiness and refuses to become Castruccio’s wife unless he gives up on his destructive plans. She refuses to deny her fidelity towards her social and political values in exchange for her husband. Castruccio does not care about Euthanasia’s political views and plans to marry her regardless of her beliefs. She does not share his point of view and has firmly decided not to be with someone who opposes her in that matter. Except Guinigi, Euthanasia is the only character who tries to reason with Castruccio and try to stop the devastation and bloodshed he is causing (Maunu, 2010). Mary Shelley presented her own views on the war through the character of Euthanasia. Shelley travelled across Europe during the time of Napoleonic wars and this is probably when she developed an interest in the destruction war brings. When she was on a trip to Switzerland to meet Byron, along with her son William, she encountered the decimation of war. Here Shelley makes a connection between Napoleon and Castruccio. Napoleon has been defeated and exiled in April 1814, a couple of months before Shelley’s trip. So, this made it possible for Shelley to witness firsthandly what a tyrant is capable to do to a region. Shelley wrote a comment published in her book *History* about the devastation brought upon the land and people when she arrived in Switzerland (Maunu, 2010):

“We now approached scenes that reminded us of what we had nearly forgotten, that France had lately been the country in which great and extraordinary events had taken place. Nogent, a town we entered about noon the following day, had been entirely desolated by the Cossacs. Nothing could be more entire than the ruins which these barbarians had spread as they advanced; perhaps they remembered Moscow and the destruction of the Russian villages; but we were now in France, and the distress of the inhabitants, whose houses had been burned, their cattle killed, and all their wealth destroyed, has given a sting to my detestation of war, which none can feel who have not travelled through a country pillaged and wasted by this plague, which, in his pride, man inflicts upon his fellow.” (Shelley, M. & Shelley, P., p. 12 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

*History* came out in 1817, the same year she started writing *Valperga* and the connections are more than obvious. Euthanasia is portrayed as a peasant driven from happiness which resembles Shelley’s early portrayal of the misfortune of the people, their burnt houses, destroyed crops, lost children. There is a connection between the barbaric treatment and their

depraved natures, latter seen in Euthanasia's and Guinigi's commentary. Shelley also connects the threat of rape by one of Napoleon's soldiers with Castruccio's policy of murder and rape. Castruccio's Italy, destroyed and thorn by war mirrors Shelley's perception of France, destroyed by Napoleon's war. Even though Euthanasia never succeeds in her efforts to persuade Castruccio not to continue with his battles and destruction, she constantly tries to repair his damage (Maunu, 2010):

“she felt as if, bound to him by an indissoluble chain, it was her business to follow, like an angel, in his track, to heal the wounds that he inflicted ... A heroic sentiment possessed her mind and lifted her above humanity; she must atone for the crimes of him she had loved.” (*Valperga*, p. 339 as cited in Maunu, 2010)

The names given to female protagonists in this novel grab the reader's attention. Euthanasia's name could be a symbol for termination of suffering. She wished to bring peace and liberty to her people. Her political views are unique and out of all the characters she is the most compassionate and the well-being of her people stays her number one priority even when it results in the loss of the love of her life. The name Beatrice comes from the Italian word which means blessed. Beatrice presents herself as a vessel for the word of God and when Castruccio first sees her she reminds him of the Virgin Mary. This is an allusion to Dante's Beatrice who is pure and a symbol of divine grace as she leads Dante through Paradise. Castruccio's Beatrice is on the other hand accused of heresy multiple times throughout the novel and in her conversation with Euthanasia she eventually renounces God because of all the evil she sees in the world.

*Valperga* is Shelley's first novel with a historical theme, providing evidence of detailed research. Shelley has studied the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, along with its fashions. Shelley has invented two main female characters, Beatrice and Euthanasia, as an example for the tradition of minimized the role of women and she stops more than once to create a remark on the Italian tradition of drama and poetry. *Valperga* is, in comparison with *Frankenstein*, most obviously a gynocentric novel, which means that it is told from the female point of view and centered around women. It is Shelley's attempt to remake her relationship with her mother, whom she never knew, except through her writing (Domke, 2013). It is also believed that the novel is a defense of faith in God. Euthanasia is portrayed as a model Catholic and almost identifies with the Virgin Mary, particularly in her role as the guide and teacher of faith and despite the influence of her husband, Shelley remains firm about her belief in God and never renounces her faith. *Valperga* is a drama of ambition and love with modern dynamics of power and gender. Writing

*Valperga* could also be a sort of language therapy after going through an extreme trauma, such as the death of her husband. *Valperga* actively challenges standard boundaries. It is a historical novel, but it always keeps the mind of the reader in a contemporary moment (Domke, 2013).

### **5. *The Last Man* – abject state of humanity and the reversal of hope**

*The Last Man* (1826) and *Frankenstein* merge together perfectly to provide a literary, social, and political overview on the world state in the nineteenth century. These two novels force together multiple Romantic topics, as love, birth, war, companionship, and nature. Mary Shelley also challenges many Romantic and revolutionary ideas enforced by her husband and her parents (Phillips, 1999). When read together as equals, they provide a great critique of Romantic principles of historical progress and idealism, the core of the radicalism in her time. Through *The Last Man*, Shelley provides a more profound critique of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. After Mary's husband died, she returned to England and found no one close to her to provide the support in the way she needed. The influence of that situation is visible in *Frankenstein* and brought up again in a noticeably complex environment in *The Last Man* when she challenges those Romantic tenets originated from the members of her family (Phillips, 1999). By connecting the texts using different parallels, she expresses her thoughts on the current state of the functioning society and people's treatment of each other. *The Last Man* gives "an even more devastating critique of Romantic ideology than does *Frankenstein*." (Mellor, p. 157 as cited in Phillips, 1999)

*The Last Man* revolves around Lionel, who is capable to balance his ambition with his domestic obligations. When Lionel finds out about philosophy, government, religion, and the rest of similar concepts from Adrian, he is not dragged into that world fully, as he is still focused on his family and eventually falls in love. Lionel soon marries Adrian's sister, Idris. The two form a family, living a long life. Lionel's sister on the other hand has a functioning marriage at the beginning, but her husband Raymond becomes unfaithful, and they separate. Raymond's lover dies in a war, which affects him deeply. Lionel, Perdita and Clara, Perdita's only child, help Raymond recover, but unfortunately, he later gets killed in a war. After this event, Perdita, suffering from that loss, commits suicide. This was a very extreme example of how desire and ambition can destroy a family (Phillips, 1999). Adrian is self-involved, never married and he is a middleman between family unit and ambition. He does not have to concern himself with

keeping his domestic responsibilities. He never finds love, rejected in that sense, eventually he dies in a shipwreck. This is Mary Shelley's reminiscing on her husband Percy's death. Lionel, with a strong family connection, lives the longest, but in the end, he has the title of the last man. Lionel is left alone and isolated, Nature had punished him, like most of Shelley's main characters. The Romantic concept of Nature cleansing the soul is not a coincidence. Mary has quite often suffered alone at crucial points in her emotional development. Her mother dying when she was born, her father not visiting her when she was ill, Percy's distance and lack of support when they lost their children (Phillips, 1999).

“There was freedom in it, a companionship with nature, and a reckless loneliness; but these, romantic as they were, did not accord with the love of action and desire of human sympathy, characteristic of youth.” (*The Last Man*, p. 8 as cited in Phillips, 1999)

Shelley's argument of domestic and political struggle is shown through the tension between the active life that tempts the man away from the family and the domestic tranquility and sovereignty that women offer to tempt him back home (Lynch, 2013). Perdita and Raymond's marriage at first seemed superior to the politics. Shelley shows through Perdita that regardless of class, a woman has a dependent position in marriage, subjected to her husband and devoting herself to keep him happy. But Shelley is conflicted in how this complex situation can function when men move between the private and public sphere on their own will and women can only exist in the private sphere. For Shelley, this bad distribution of power between men and women and the movement of men out in the exclusively male public, leads to the destruction of both worlds (Lynch, 2013).

Shelley started writing *The Last Man* at an extremely difficult time in her life. It was time of great loneliness for her, and she could not find relief in anything, except for writing. She was unable to share her sorrow with anyone because nobody could understand what she felt at the time. To handle the situation, she started writing the novel in 1824 and published it in 1826. It is a revolutionary novel because it affected the future of literature and built a steady road for science fiction (Gagliardi, 2019). The story's main protagonist, Lionel Verney, has touched multiple diverse topics and can be examined in many diverse aspects. The novel includes multiple love triangles, psychological problems, and political debates. The narrator is a spokesman for Shelley's reaction and vision to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century social aspect of the people, the embodied ideologies of her liberal parents and the Romantic ideologies of her husband. Although it is an apocalyptic topic, using a narrator and telling the story indirectly makes it easier on the reader, providing a kind of relief from anxiety of picturing the world in which



there is nobody. The novel had caused a lot of negative reactions from Shelley's contemporaries. It is placed far in the future from the year that the novel was written, yet it seems too similar to the life at the time (Gagliardi, 2019).

The novel contains three volumes, each different from the other. In these volumes, destruction of humanity is gradually described. Each volume also retraces various periods in Mary's life and reflects her psychological state. The first volume has a positive tone. Friendship, youth, idealized community, probably describing Shelley's own formative years, giving a sense of a happy circle. The idealized community is destroyed with the main character leaving a safe environment to learn about the external world. Once that happens, the happy circle is poisoned (Gagliardi, 2019). The second volume and the third volume are filled with feelings of pressure, loss and spiritual danger reflecting the last years of Shelley's life. The main protagonist is Lionel Verney. His father is a nobleman who has lost everything. Before he dies, his father tries to make sure his children will be taken care of. He sends a letter to the King, asking for a favour, that he takes his children, Lionel and his sister Perdita. The King never gets the letter, and the children grow up in poverty for a long time, creating a resentment towards the kingdom and royalty. After they have all grown up, they meet Adrian, the King's son and a Republican. Adrian educates Lionel and they develop a firm friendship. After some time, they meet Raymond, a lord who aspires to be a leader of England. Lionel meets Idris, Adrian's sister, and falls in love and soon marries her. Perdita marries Raymond, but he soon engages in an affair with a Greek princess Evadne. Eventually, Perdita finds out about the affair, she separates from Raymond, and he goes to Constantinople to join a war against the Turks (Gagliardi, 2019).

The second volume shifts from the positivity of the first one. People all over are getting ill and a disease is spreading. Perdita and her daughter, Clara, go after Raymond in Constantinople and Lionel accompanies them. Evadne is killed fighting for Raymond's beliefs, while Raymond gets killed on the battlefield. Perdita cannot handle this course of events and commits suicide. The surviving party goes back to England, and at this point Adrian takes the lead of the country. He tries to find a solution to fight the plague, but unfortunately, he is not successful. The third volume also seems hopeless and dark. In the year 2100 life has been destroyed by the plague and so is the rest of the world. The only surviving people are Adrian, Lionel and Clara who sail by ship to the Continent in hope of salvation. Adrian and Clara die while sailing and Lionel is left alone (Gagliardi, 2019).

“Around the shores of a deserted earth, while the sun is high and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted.” (*The Last Man*, p. 375 as cited in Gagliardi, 2019)

There is a common point in *Frankenstein* and the plague in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in *The Last Man*, because both novels emerge as an interest that Shelley had for scientific discoveries and their impacts on human life and social order. But both plots had a different reaction from the critics. *Frankenstein* was immediately popular and successful, praised by the readers and the critics, while things went differently with *The Last Man*. The readership did not appreciate it and in a sense rejected it. There were numerous critiques about the vocabulary used in the novel. The sentences repeat themselves, but justification can be found in the fact that Shelley probably experimented with the language, using her late husband’s work as an inspiration (Gagliardi, 2019). Nevertheless, contemporary critics made the novel unpopular. Modern critics are different. They call it a supremely complex and modern masterpiece made from Shelley’s perception of the cultural and political contradictions that England was faced with. Modern scholars who study the career and life of Mary Shelley analyze the novel under multiple aspects like biopolitics, conceptions of time, art, theatre, politics and more. The novel has a narrative of a devastating future that revolves around the author with no readers left (Gagliardi, 2019).

*The Last Man* is a gateway to the science-fictional apocalyptic novels which became popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Mary Shelley created *The Last Man*, she was only 27, but already a widow, living in London. This apocalyptic atmosphere was probably the consequence of the melancholia she suffered because of the death of her husband. A plague is a sickness that kills fast and painfully. There were also other events in her time that affected the author’s mind. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a volcano erupted on an island called Sumbawa, located in today’s Indonesia. This eruption is known to be one of the most powerful in history. There were so many ashes from the eruption that this event lowered global temperatures. That event was known as the year without a summer. There is no doubt this occurrence stimulated Shelley's imagination. There was also a cholera pandemic originating in India that fast spread all over the globe. It killed almost 30 000 people every day and at that time they did not know how to stop the spreading. This disease made the author think about the black plague, because of the similarity in a way of killing (Gagliardi, 2019).

In *Frankenstein* Shelley searches for reconciliation of the ideas of fellowship and genius. With Walton as a character, she finds the means for those ideas and its achievements and creates balance between those ideas and the sacrifices they require. When *The Last Man* was written,

Shelley's optimism diminished. If this transition is evidence of Mary's moving from happier time to much darker times, it is still just a theory made by scholars and cannot be confirmed. Many of them think that her own experience is the main reason for the mood captured in *The Last Man* and that the devastating feelings she had are responsible for such a melancholic tone (Smith, 1991). By the time Shelley decided to write her novel, it also seems that she has developed a more powerful critique regarding the socio-political system she was raised in. Enough time passed for the French Revolution to be fully understood. If we compare *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, the second is less symbolic, but Lionel is a much more tragic character than Walton. Unlike in *Frankenstein* Shelley researches the result of a total system breakdown. If some parts of the bigger system function on their own, the result is certainly isolation, as in the example of antithetical ideals of fellowship and genius (Smith, 1991).

Shelley was a daughter of a well-known women's right activist, so her work was usually observed under the feminist perspective. For that reason, few passages in the novel include Nature and gender relations. Many of these relations explain the woman's subordinations to the opposite sex and they are often shown through Nature. Nature is usually portrayed as a female, expressed with the feminine pronouns (Rodriguez, 2018). But Nature is also interpreted as the minister of man:

“that man's mind alone was the creator of all that was good or great to man, and that Nature herself was only his first minister.” (*The Last Man*, p. 5 as cited in Rodriguez, 2018)

The Earth is also viewed as a female. Earth's orb is a female, but completely disregarded by Lionel. When moved from the fact that women are subordinate to men, here, also used as a metaphor, Nature presents how society tends to be phallogocentric (Rodriguez, 2018). Phallogocentric is a term blended from the words phallogocentric and logocentric by Jacques Derrida and it refers to the privileges of the masculine in a social context. For this purpose, Shelley uses natural elements completely different from each other, in order to describe men and women. When we isolate women for example, the author describes Perdita with these words:

“She was like a fruitful soil that imbibed the airs and dews of heaven and gave them forth again to light in loveliest forms of fruits and flowers.” (*The Last Man*, p. 11 as cited in Rodriguez, 2018)

Men, unlike women, are connected with phallic elements of nature. Verney, for example, is always described using metaphors that reference natural elements like strong and high trees:

“I stood on the brink of manhood; passions, strong as the trees of a forest, had already taken root within me.” (*The Last Man*, p. 13 as cited in Rodriguez, 2018)

Thus, bringing up the fact that women are fruit and soil is an evidence of comparing them to mere means of reproduction. Erected trees, power, supremacy, those are terms that were used for men (Rodriguez, 2018). When Verney is in London, at Westminster Abbey, he says:

“I could trust that he who built up the mountains, planted the forests, and poured out the rivers, would erect another state for lost humanity, where we might awaken again to our affections, our happiness, and our faith.” (*The Last Man*, p. 226 as cited in Rodriguez, 2018)

We can see that Verney’s petition is the remake of high trees and mountains that would again erect humanities state (Rodriguez, 2018).

Even though characters like Raymond express ideals or persons connected to Mary’s traits, Adrian is certainly the closest looking protagonist resembling her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. There are critics arguing that she wrote *The Last Man* because she was denied writing a biography of her husband. Adrian was a means to an end to provide a way of showing her personal thought about Percy (Domke, 2013). When we look at the beginning of the novel and read a description of Adrian, we are probably seeing Percy in his school days:

“His sensibility and courtesy fascinated everyone. His vivacity, intelligence, and active spirit of benevolence completed the conquest. Even at this early age, he was deep read and imbued with the spirit of high philosophy. This spirit gave a tone of irresistible persuasion to his intercourse with others, so that he seemed like an inspired musician, who struck, with unerring skill, the ‘lyre of mind,’ and produced thence divine harmony. In person, he hardly appeared of this world; his slight frame was overinformed by the soul that dwelled within; he was all mind.” (*The Last Man*, p. 18 as cited in Domke, 2013)

Adrian is portrayed as a slim, tall, fair boy with excessive refinement and sensibility. He is most certainly described as an idealized version of Percy. Adrian is also intent on destroying the monarchy and has an absolute confidence in the human will, also a trait of the real-life Percy Shelley. In his private life, Percy was a crazed enthusiast and a radical atheist, so Mary creates a character so dedicated to serving the humanity, neglecting himself to the point of sacrificing himself. This is the exact way Lionel sees Adrian when they first meet. Lionel is therefore interpreted as Shelley’s alter ego (Domke, 2013). As mentioned before, Adrian took Lionel as

his student, but he never really tried to make his ideas become reality. He intended to present a perfect system to the English government, but he never managed to unite power and knowledge. Even though Adrian is born as a public figure making him very close to the English throne and even though he possesses a lot of knowledge, he cannot seem to connect his knowledge with power and begin to embody his ideas into reality. Rather, his is driven away into madness by his love towards Evadne (Domke, 2013).

At first, we cannot be sure of the gender of the narrator or of his companion. Both are consciously displaced, in the same way that the roles of men and women are displaced too. Verney comments on multiple occasions about how males and females respond to emotional experiences and how they differ, men being fearful of being unmanly, but ultimately emotionally responding with tears and sorrow, which is a characteristic of women (Benett, 1995). This action blurs the behavior between men and women. The Countess of Windsor is characterized as a tyrant and extremely unprincipled. Evadne, when depicted as a warrior, acts out with male behavior patterns. That behavior is also found with other female characters when in face of death and deprivation. For example, the bands of female religious fanatics characterized by their eagerness which is stronger than that of their male companions. The novel shows the reader a radical world that does not reject women or men for what they are, but instead offers a restrictive image of their social and personal roles. In her later novels, Mary Shelley again places women in combat. *The Last Man* in an attack on all conventional and individual, but also civic stratifications. Shelley's futuristic tendencies have been criticized for not having enough speculations in the story. But on the other hand, her degendering of male and female roles has been characterized as inventive and, in our time, very recognized (Benett, 1995).

*The Last Man* received a lot of criticism, one of them being that Mary is simply expressing her husband's theories, when in fact she used this novel to present her own ideas about anti-Romantic future. The novel was written as an homage to the great Romantic poets who had passed, but also to show the flaws in Romantic ideologies. In this novel Shelley rejects the idea of God, that is she rejects the idea of some invisible force that creates and controls the universe to guide it towards a higher purpose. By doing this she creates an inversion of the Romantic myth of consciousness and abandons all hope for the future of humanity because there is no greater plan of the universe. This shows that Shelley does not just reciprocate the ideas of contemporary Romantics but rather that she is able to create her own opinions and express them

as an author. Just like in *Frankenstein*, the *The Last Man* revolves around a Gothic wanderer left alone in the world without a meaning (Tichelaar, 2012).

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to give an insight into Mary Shelley's prose and show that her work delves into the fundamental ideologies of the Romantic Age. Many critics accused her of simply being a medium for the ideas of those around her, specifically her husband and her parents. Her work evinces exceedingly capable and perceptive individual who managed to cleverly present her world of ideas. Mary Shelley put many of her life experiences into her work and some critics strongly agree that certain autobiographical elements can be found in all her novels. She spent most of her life reading the works of her father and her mother whose presence she greatly missed. Every human is in the largest amount shaped by their parents, and she was not an exception. Her mother Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first feminists, advocating for women's rights to an education. Shelley found a way to incorporate her mother's ideas in her novel without making it obvious. Her father William Godwin, the most prominent British radical, philosopher and writer, imparted his ideas on politics and freedom to her; however, possibly the greatest influence in her life was that of her husband's, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Many of his world views as a prominent representative of the Romantic movement, were presented and even critiqued in Mary's prose.

Mary was surrounded with great authors of the Romantic period, and she learned about their ideas from first-hand experience. In many aspects she agreed with their insights and her novels employ many of the Romantic postulates. However, when it comes to the idea of the Romantic imagination which was a power of creation only poets possessed, she thought of it as narcissistic. She did not believe that any human could and should possess such power and she was strongly opposed to the Romantic idea of overcoming human limitations. She was also very aware of the imbalance in power between man and women in the society and her approach to this issue is most intriguing. Mary believed that this imbalance can only bring destruction to the world and that this world cannot exist without the feminine energy. She did not think that the feminine should be superior to masculine or that women should take over all the positions of power but rather that feminine and masculine needed to be in balance so that humanity can prosper.

All of these ideas are explored in this paper through three of her novels: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, *Valperga: or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* and *The Last Man*. Mary Shelley was a complex and brilliant individual whose novels forever

marked literary history and she will always be known as the author of one of the most captivating novels ever written, the story of *Frankenstein*.



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